

Tapes tutor serious salespeople

People who sell for a living always need new ideas and confidence-builders. Here's a business tool that does just that.

For years now, some of the hottest how-to audio tapes have been targeted to those who sell for a living. They're especially useful for salespeople who do a lot of driving and have a cassette player in the car.

But most of those taped sales courses require many hours of listening to get the full impact, and the format does not lend itself to listening in bite-size chunks between appointments. How could the concept be improved?

Nightingale Conant of Chicago, (800) 323-5552, the company that produces so many tapes for business, found a way. It started offering monthly tapes for salespeople, each containing an assortment of sales tips.

The product is called Sound Selling, and each issue contains two one-hour-long cassettes. The tapes are narrated by numerous sales advisers who have been on the



Hillel Segal

seminar circuit, and most of whom have produced their own more lengthy taped programs. A 12-month subscription costs about \$120.

I sent off for a subscription but was disappointed with the first issue. The tips were good, but there were just too many of them. There must have been 10 speakers on each cassette side, dispensing so much information in such a short a time that I couldn't absorb each point before the next one came barreling along.

The second issue, however, was much better. Fewer topics were included and the treatment of each sales tip was still brief but much more thorough.

Now that they've been perfected, the tapes fulfill their initial objective. I particularly liked the fol-

lowing features:

■ The snippets of advice are long enough to drive home the points, but short enough to listen to in the car between calls. They fit well within a salesman's workday.

■ Because new tapes arrive regularly, you're always getting fresh material and motivation. There's always something new.

■ The speakers are not cut-and-dried in their approach — they often use tasteful humor to make their points stick.

Each issue of Sound Selling is set up just like an audio magazine. Sales pros share their expertise, and tips cover such topics as how to physically project confidence, time management, working on self-esteem and building rapport with clients. There are also longer monthly features, such as a "how-I-made-the-sale" case history and a "star salesperson" profile.

The tapes are clearly intended, however, only for sales professionals. People who aren't in that line of work may bristle at what easily could be called manipulative tech-

niques.

The emphasis on such things as always handing out business cards, always looking for referrals and always being cheery, sounds pushy and reinforces the dreaded stereotypes about sales personalities.

Sometimes I recommend sales tapes to people who aren't in sales, just so they can familiarize themselves with some of the techniques or get ideas for dealing with their bosses or clients.

But this particular product is too "hard-core sales" for the non-professional.

The bottom line: For the salesperson with a cassette player in the car, Sound Selling is very worthwhile. But if you're interested in an introduction to sales tips, look at a less hard-core offering.

Hillel Segal's column has been broadened to include evaluations of gadgets, seminars and books designed to enhance business productivity. Segal is a management consultant based in Boulder.